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ABSTRACT

For the past five years, colleagues in the Strategic Literacy Initiative at WestEd have been designing and implementing a professional development program focused on enabling teachers to build their understanding of the complexities of reading. In developing this program, centered around what they call a "Reading Apprenticeship" framework, the Initiative has been working collaboratively with cross-school networks of interdisciplinary site-based teams involving over 300 middle and high school content area teachers throughout the San Francisco Bay area. The goal for these professional development sessions is to assist teachers in building the internalized knowledge and experience base necessary for them to carry out the kind of long-range planning, refinement, and on-the-spot classroom problem-solving that expert teaching of reading within a content classroom demands. Rather than a professional development approach, the approach being developed is what is called a "generative model." It is generative in the sense that teachers engage in a series of highly-designed activities over time intended to challenge their conceptions of reading tasks and perceptions of students' reading, and to expand their knowledge from which they can then generate various solutions to assist students' reading development in their classroom. The center of the program is a guided and carefully structured inquiry process, or cycle of inquiry, built around what is called literacy learning cases. For the past three years, a study of teacher knowledge growth and change in the professional development networks has been carried out, and the program's case inquiry method appears to help teachers teaching content reading. Contains 20 references. (NKA)

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Tapping Teachers' Reading Expertise: Generative Professional Development with Middle and High School Content-Area Teachers

By Ruth Schoenbach and Cynthia Greenleaf

Paper presented at the
National Center on Education and the Economy
Secondary Reading Symposium

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Bumping Up Against the "Literacy Ceiling"

You can't rely on students to read. I feel like I'm constantly summarizing so that kids don't miss the main points. I wish I didn't have to assume that role as much, but I find I do. (Ms. J, September, 1997)

I'd say [my greatest success this year was] bringing in the text… Rather than just letting it sit on the shelf and guiding the kids through it, teaching them the skills to understand it rather than just ignoring it and spoon feeding them. (Ms. J., May, 1998)

A quiet crisis focused on the reading abilities of adolescent students has been brewing recently among this country's secondary school teachers. Facing a push for increased accountability as measured by prescribed standardized tests, middle and high school teachers are voicing concerns about what we have come to call the adolescent "literacy ceiling"—students' difficulties engaging in and understanding subject-area texts. Painfully aware that this literacy ceiling limits what students can achieve in and beyond the classroom, many teachers express frustration: "Why didn't somebody do a better job earlier of preparing these students to read what they need to read to succeed at this grade level?" Others express a sense of bewilderment and inadequacy: "What am I supposed to do when they can barely get through a page in the textbook on their own? I'm a subject-area teacher; not a reading teacher!" Perhaps most disconcerting is the resigned despair we hear in the opinion of some educators that "it's too late for these students to catch up."

Feeling pressed to cover the curriculum, unprepared to assist students with reading, and eager to make sure students understand the content of a particular discipline, many teachers find themselves teaching *around* reading. They make adjustments that may seem sensible, but that they know to be compromises. "I'm doing back flips in the classroom to get the content across without expecting them to read the textbook," one history teacher told us. "I've stopped assigning reading; the text is almost supplementary for my history curriculum."

For the past five years, we and our colleagues in the Strategic Literacy Initiative at WestEd have been designing and implementing a professional development program focused on enabling teachers to build their understanding of the complexities of reading. In developing this program, centered around what we call a *Reading Apprenticeship*® framework, we have been working collaboratively with cross-school networks composed of interdisciplinary site-based teams involving over three hundred middle and high school content area teachers throughout the San Francisco Bay Area. Our goal in designing and implementing these series of professional development sessions is to assist teachers in building the internalized knowledge and experience base necessary for them to carry out the kind of long-range planning, refinement, and on-the-spot classroom problem-solving that expert teaching of reading within a content classroom demands.

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From our studies of teacher knowledge growth and change in these networks, we have evidence that as teachers build this personalized and increasingly complex set of understandings about reading in their discipline over time, they become increasingly skillful at developing classroom interventions which can expand students' conceptions of reading, increase students' strategic reading abilities, and engage students' sense of agency as they become more motivated, active readers. Thus, rather than a professional development approach which is either highly scripted and prescriptive or too open-ended to address teachers' pragmatic needs, the approach we are developing is what we call a *generative model*. It is generative in the sense that teachers engage in a series of highly-designed activities over time which are intended to challenge their conceptions of reading tasks and perceptions of students' reading, and to expand their knowledge from which they can then generate various solutions to assist students' reading development in their classrooms.

Our belief in the efficacy of this generative model of professional development has been supported by promising results among students of teachers participating in one of the Strategic Literacy Initiative networks that we have studied in depth. Overall, our studies show that when a diverse population of urban secondary students are given classroom support in reading, they adopt a more engaged, active reading stance in relation to themselves as readers and in relation to texts. In addition, these students, whose reading performance lags behind that of their age-mates nationally, make statistically significant reading growth as measured by a norm-referenced reading comprehension test, with English language learners showing the largest gains (Schoenbach, Greenleaf, Cziko, & Hurwitz, 1999).

A Generative Approach to Professional Development

Recently, a consensus among educators has been growing as to what constitutes high quality professional development (Guskey & Huberman, 1996; Sparks & Hirsch, 1997). Professional development is recognized as high quality if it engages teachers as learners over time, offers teachers the resources necessary to gain skill and knowledge, creates opportunities for teachers to reflect on their teaching and their students' learning, and recognizes teachers' expertise. Our professional development approach is grounded in these principles, as well as in our experience since 1988 creating learning opportunities for teachers in which they find the intellectual and social resources needed to make deep changes in their knowledge, beliefs, and classroom practice. This generative professional development is designed to: 1) Inform, and potentially transform, teachers' basic conceptions of and approaches to teaching--in this case, to teaching reading in their discipline; 2) provide teachers with practical, immediately useful strategies for classroom application; and 3) support and enable teachers to generate new knowledge based on their own syntheses of theory, case inquiry experiences, and a cycle of classroom implementation, assessment, reflection, and refinement of classroom practice.

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Our approach to developing knowledgeable and skillful teachers of reading in the content areas draws from and shares key features of other innovative professional development enterprises, such as ongoing book or study clubs for teachers (Flood & Lapp, 1995; Wineburg & Grossman, 1998); autobiography clubs (Florio-Ruane & DeTar, 1995); case methods of teacher education (Barnett, 1991; Moje & Wade, 1997; Risko, 1995); teacher research (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1992); and National Writing Project institutes (Smith, 1996). In all of these programs, teachers are recognized as generators of knowledge and are engaged in reflection and critique of their own classroom practice within a supportive community of teacher and researcher colleagues.

The center of our professional development program is a guided and carefully structured inquiry process, or *cycle of inquiry*, built around what we call *literacy learning cases*. The four elements of the case inquiry process include opportunities for participants to 1) Investigate their own and each others' reading processes; 2) examine the challenges different types of texts present for readers; 3) look closely at student reading performances through video-and-text-based case materials; and 4) exchange ideas about and plan to implement (and then refine) specific classroom practices related to students' improved reading. Below, we describe two key parts of the case inquiry process and their importance in helping content-area teachers and the students they serve break through the literacy ceiling.

Tapping Teachers' (Tacit) Reading Expertise

My [own reading] process changed, I think, without a lot of direct awareness on my part, so there's like this two-layer process that's going on. I'm becoming aware of the concepts about text and how text works, and then I'm also changing the way I'm looking at text. It's just allowed me to be much more aware of the structure of text and how much I bring to it that I already know and I assumed my students know... I think that's what I meant in the beginning when I said I've become a lot less frustrated with how long it takes them and how much needs to be articulated and scaffolded for them. It's amazing to me how difficult and how complex reading is. (Ms. G.)

The Reading Apprenticeship® framework we have developed to support teachers and students in this work of reading improvement depends on tapping into teachers' awareness of their own and others' reading processes. Because most secondary content teachers have not spent much time thinking about the mental processes by which they make sense of texts in their fields, however, this knowledge--embedded in their own experiences as readers--is invisible and therefore unavailable to most of them. In fact, few middle and high school teachers see their own abilities to read subject area texts as a powerful resource for helping students approach these texts independently, confidently and successfully.

In a variety of ways—through think aloud protocols, reflective writing and sharing of reading processes, close readings and text discussions, and discipline-based reading analysis—we engage groups of teachers in reading challenging texts and

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articulating the dispositions, affective responses, and reading expertise they operate with as proficient readers. As teachers become more aware of the complex ways in which they themselves make sense of text, they gain new appreciation for the reading difficulties students may face. Often, they go beyond what has been described in the research on comprehension, surprising us with descriptions of comprehension strategies as yet undescribed by researchers. They gain a language for talking about comprehension practices that are invisible and, at times, difficult to articulate. Finally, they come to understand, by reading in the company of colleagues who may approach texts differently, that their own ways of reading are learned ways, and therefore can, and must, be taught to students if we are to help all students to gain advanced literacy competence. Teachers are then ready to "apprentice" their students to the reading craft by making their invisible comprehension processes visible to their students (see Greenleaf, et al., 1999 for a description of this process of teacher knowledge development).

Looking Closely into Student Reading

The student case materials we have created for use in the case inquiry process-video and text-based "close-ups" of ninth grade students struggling with and making sense of various texts-give teachers a chance to hear students talking about their reading histories and habits, and to see students reading a variety of academic and recreational texts and responding to an interviewer's questions about their reading. These cases not only provide teachers with a window into students' reading "errors" and challenges, but also provide a closer look at the strengths and theories about reading which students use to make sense of school texts and reading practices. They are based on rich case studies of individual students and are informed by prior work to develop set of literacy learning cases as a part of a research study of remedial learners in post-secondary settings (Greenleaf, Hull, & Reilly, 1994).

For example, in many of the cases, teachers see students read expository texts, such as magazine articles about popular sports or music figures, that they have chosen for recreational reading. By analyzing the reading strategies and strengths students bring to their recreational reading, teachers are able to generate ideas for building on these strengths to help students understand the expository texts assigned in school. Across the varied cases, teachers have the opportunity to see that students approach and read different texts quite differently, that reading is shaped by many situational factors, and that students' reading of one text will not demonstrate the full range of reading strategies and skills they may actually have at their disposal. The case materials unsettle teachers' first impressions of students, drive them to look more deeply at how students are thinking and what resources they are bringing to reading tasks, and help them to recognize what Rose (1989) has called "the incipient excellence" that characterizes many under-performing students in our classrooms.

What does Generative Professional Development through Case Inquiry Generate?

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Just as the problem of their students' "literacy ceiling"—students' limited abilities to engage in and understand academic texts—frustrates many middle school and high school teachers, the problem of generating conceptual change leading to changes in classroom practice has stymied the field of professional development (for example, see a recent review by Agee, 1998). Numerous studies have documented that when secondary subject area teachers are provided with training in teaching strategies for "reading across the curriculum," changes in teachers' knowledge or beliefs about reading are not accompanied by changes in their teaching practices (Alvermann & Moore, 1991; Conley & Warren, 1988; Konopak, Wilson & Readence, 1994; Moje & Wade, 1997; O'Brien, 1988). We recognize that the explanations given for this lack of uptake into the classroom are reasonable, among them that teachers resist adding to their teaching load, adopt positions consonant with their subject area identification, and are constrained by the organizational contexts in which they teach. However, we would argue that more importantly, subject-area teachers lack the generative knowledge base about discipline-based reading they need to make use of these strategies.

For the past three years, we have been carrying out a study of teacher knowledge growth and change in our professional development networks, with funding from the Spencer/MacArthur Program in Professional Development Documentation and Research. The questions guiding this study are: How does case inquiry develop teacher expertise in the domain of reading? and What aspects of case inquiry are most productive for teacher development in this domain? In this study, we have seen that case inquiry in the Strategic Literacy Networks leads to changed teacher conceptions of reading, changed teacher conceptions of texts, changed teacher conceptions of students and students' reading-both their assets and their difficulties--and a changed teacher repertoire of classroom practices (Greenleaf, 1999). In turn, these changes help teachers create a classroom environment that is student-centered rather than teacher-directed and that is characterized by high student engagement and self direction, high expectations for student performance, frequent collaboration between and among teachers and students, and high accountability on the part of both teachers and students for student learning. This pedagogy is motivated from within by teachers who now understand what reading entails and what texts demand, and have the means to assist students in gaining this kind of strategic knowledge for themselves.

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